

Diocese of Chichester

**Guidelines for
Rural Deans**

Updated April 2009

Guidelines for Rural Deans

Introduction

A rural deanery is a collection of parishes grouped together within an archdeaconry for administrative purposes. The Diocese of Chichester has twenty-one rural deaneries, each with a rural dean appointed as an officer of the Bishop. A rural dean will normally be the incumbent of a parish within the deanery.

The office of rural dean is an ancient one going back to 1148 when Robert de Ecclesfield was appointed to the position in the diocese of York. One of the duties of a rural dean in the middle ages was to carry out the public flogging of anyone who had broken the Church's moral law. As the power of the bishops increased, the power of the rural deans was reduced, and the office eventually died out.

In 1837 the bishop of Norwich inherited a number of lax and badly behaved clergy so he revised the office to control them. This century more power was returned to rural deans with the Enabling Act (1919) and the Synodical Government Measure (1969). The duties of a rural dean are outlined in Canon C23. (See Appendix A)

Appointment

The appointment of a rural dean is in the hands of the bishop. The bishop writes to all incumbents, priests-in-charge, assistant clergy, and clergy licensed under seal in the deanery, and also to the lay chairman, asking for views on the appointment and inviting them to send the names, in order of preference, of the three people they would most like to see appointed. The bishop appoints the new rural dean after considering this advice.

Rural Dean's job description

Summary

The job of a rural dean, can, by and large, be summarised as follows:

- (i) helping the Bishop in his episcopate and care of the deanery
- (ii) providing a supportive and collaborative leadership for mission and ministry in the deanery
- (iii) convening Chapter and co-chairing Deanery Synod and its work; being a friend to clergy and lay leaders of the parishes;
- (iv) sometimes deputising for the archdeacon in his parish visitations

Assisting the bishop

Canon C23 requires the rural dean 'to report to the bishop any matter in any parish within the deanery which it may be necessary or useful for the bishop to know'. It goes on to suggest particular vigilance in the areas of clergy distress or sickness, vacancies and unauthorised ministry. The rural dean is also charged with alerting the bishop to any lapses in procedure in the parishes and reporting any defect in or disrepair of their church buildings to the archdeacon. In addition, the rural dean is joint chairman of the deanery synod. In practice, this role has been extended to capitalise on the crucial position held by rural deans, in that they are best placed to be the eyes and ears for the bishop in parishes. The rural dean's duty is to support diocesan initiatives, even if on a personal level he or she disagrees with them.

Welfare of clergy and licensed lay workers



One of the most important roles of a rural dean is that of senior colleague to the clergy in the deanery. Newer clergy will particularly appreciate the support and guidance a rural dean can offer, and clergy experiencing problems will regard you as their 'shop steward'. You should also take a leading role in welcoming incumbents or priests-in-charge who are new to the deanery, and if possible take them on a familiarisation tour of the deanery.

Cases of sickness, financial hardship or any other emergencies affecting clergy should be reported to the archdeacon or area bishop, who also welcome advice and information about the career needs of the deanery clergy. News of children born in clergy families should be passed to the archdeacon and bishop. In particular, the rural dean should check that clergy are taking their proper holiday entitlement, and give advice about assistance if difficulties arise over holiday or sickness cover.

Rural deans are also asked to exercise pastoral oversight over retired clergy and clergy widows resident in their deanery. Although Jonathan Prichard (contact through Church House) is the officer in charge of this special flock, he nevertheless relies on their rural dean and parish priest to keep an eye on them for him and keep him informed of any developments. The parish priest is primarily responsible for the pastoral care of retired clergy as for all parishioners.

Parishes

Every year the archdeacon holds a visitation to churchwardens under Canon C22. Every three years under Canon F18 he conducts a visitation to individual parishes to survey property and to check on good practice. He may ask the relevant rural dean to deputise for him in this.

The rural dean should familiarise himself with the parishes and the church schools in his deanery and give them all possible encouragement.

Planning ahead

As co-chairman of the deanery synod, the rural dean and lay chairman work together to encourage:

- local developments in shared ministry and mission
- generous understanding and giving so that the deanery meets its deanery contribution to full ministry costs.
- discussion and consultation about the best future pastoral provision in the deanery.

Much of this planning and deliberation may take place in the deanery standing committee or through a deanery finance or pastoral committee.

Meetings

Of necessity, the rural dean's diary will have a succession of meetings. In particular you will need to make space for: the annual rural deans' meeting with the Bishop of Chichester, two or three rural deans' meetings with the area bishops, at least four meetings of the clergy chapter; and at least two deanery synods. Regular meetings with the lay chairman of the deanery synod, the standing committee and other deanery committees are also likely, and rural deans are usually invited to attend three meetings of their archdeaconry pastoral sub-committee in a year.



Confirmations



The diocesan bishop and the area bishops will liaise with their rural deans over arranging dates and venues for confirmations. Actual arrangements for confirmations will need to be discussed with the chaplain of the diocese or area bishop. The booklet *Arrangements for Confirmations* available from Church House provides further guidance in this area. Rural deans should ensure each incumbent has read and observes these arrangements.

New appointments

If the Diocesan Board of Patronage is patron of the vacant benefice, the rural dean and the lay chairman are automatically involved in the new appointment. Otherwise, unless the benefice has been suspended, the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 comes into operation, under which the rural dean does not normally have an official role. However, it is advisable to be familiar with the procedures involved in case of enquiry, and the bishop will welcome insights from the rural dean and lay chairman about forthcoming vacancies.

Institutions, inductions and licensings

It has become one of the rural dean's responsibilities to arrange these services with the help of the churchwardens and the bishop's chaplain. The chaplain will assist by providing guidelines covering such matters as the announcement, the order of service, the guest list, parking, procedure and rehearsal. The rural dean acts on behalf of the bishop in this and so should clear with him beforehand the hymns and order of service, and arrange and supervise the rehearsal. On occasion the rural dean may be called upon to deputise for the archdeacon and perform an induction on his behalf.

Sequestration during parish vacancies

When notice has been given that a benefice is to fall vacant, the rural dean should liaise with the archdeacon about familiarising the wardens/PCC about the process of running and filling the vacancy. When a benefice becomes vacant, the bishop appoints 'sequestrators' to act as his officers to execute certain functions during the vacancy. The rural dean and parish churchwardens are normally appointed sequestrators, although the bishop may appoint additional ones if he wishes. The

booklet *Notes for Sequestrators*, available from Church House, which will be sent to the churchwardens of a vacant parish, gives extensive information on all aspects of sequestration and is an invaluable guide to the duties involved.

Rural deans are responsible for worship in the vacancy and may therefore have to make arrangements for maintaining services throughout vacancies, though often parishes will be able to arrange this on their own. The diocesan directory contains lists of readers and clergy with permission to officiate to help with this. It should be emphasised that only those clergy who are beneficed, licensed or hold the bishop's permission to officiate should be invited to take these services. When making arrangements rural deans should observe any resolutions the parish has passed concerning women priests.

The rural dean is also responsible for the pastoral needs of the vacant benefice. The churchwardens should keep you informed of serious illness, hospitalization, requests for visit or home Communion. A procedure for conducting baptisms, marriages, funerals and publication of banns will need to be set up. Often retired or NSM clergy can help with all this. The churchwardens in the deanery will look to the rural dean for advice and encouragement, and the help and support they offer in return makes your job a lot easier!



Clergy chapter and synods

Clergy chapter

The rural dean is responsible for convening the clergy chapter, which consists of all the beneficed and licensed clergy of the deanery.



Historically, the chapter gained its name because it studied a chapter of scripture each time it met. Its main aim is to build up the priestly and ministerial life of its members by worshipping and praying together; and by providing a forum for the debate of issues affecting the Church and a place where information can be passed on. The chapter can also provide a valuable climate of sharing and mutual support.

As rural dean, you can make the running of the clergy chapter considerably easier by appointing a good chapter clerk, whose job description should be agreed by chapter members. Duties should include notification of meetings, minute writing, circulation to members of information from the diocese and dealings with relevant correspondence, and deputising for the rural dean at meetings where necessary. The clerk should also see that notices are circulated to those unable to attend chapter meetings. The expenses of the chapter clerk could perhaps be met from the rural dean's expenses or from deanery funds.

It may be worth holding some meetings in the evening to make it easier for non-stipendiary and sector ministers to attend. The chapter should meet at least four times a year, but you may find that more meetings prove valuable.

Deanery synod

A deanery synod is made up of two houses: clergy and laity. Its main functions (See Appendix B: Functions of Deanery Synod) are to discuss and reflect on matters of the Church of England as they affect the deanery, and generally 'to promote in the deanery the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical'. (See further *Recommended Standing Orders and Model Rules for Deanery Synods*, available from Church House.) It also acts as a forum for the airing of parish views on any common problems, the communication of diocesan synod decisions, the consideration of relevant business and the referral to diocesan synod of matters of concern. Deanery synod can have powers or functions delegated to it by diocesan synod. The house of clergy (the clergy chapter) comprises all the beneficed and licensed clergy in parish or sector ministry in the deanery. Retired clergy can select one of their number to sit on the synod, but clergy with only the bishop's permission to officiate are not members. The rural dean chairs meetings of the House of Clergy.

The house of laity comprises representatives elected three-yearly at annual parochial church meetings; lay members of General Synod and diocesan synod residing in the deanery; and other lay people, such as licensed lay workers, who are licensed by the bishop to work in any part of the deanery.

If there is no one from the deanery on General Synod, then one of the General Synod members will be allocated to the deanery as a link to represent the General Synod to the deanery and vice versa. He/she has the right to speak but not to vote in deanery synod. Your General Synod person can be a valuable and enlivening link with the wider church.

Canon law requires that deanery synod is co-chaired by the rural dean and a lay member elected by the house of laity. The standing committee decides the agenda for each meeting, and the rural dean and lay chairman divide the chairmanship of the synod's meetings and its sub-committees between them. The lay chairman should be seen as a partner in the work of the deanery and a provider of valuable support for the rural dean. Regular meetings between the rural dean and the lay chairman are vital and assist the smooth running of synod and avoid the time being wasted through poor communications.

Deanery synod meets at least twice a year and extra meetings may be called if needed, providing that the relevant procedures are followed. It may have as many standing committees as it requires and can determine how these are to operate.

Detailed information on procedure may be found in *Model Rules for Deanery Synods*, and requests for copies of this or queries on procedures should be addressed to the diocesan secretary, Francesca Del Mese, at Church House.

Diocesan synod

Diocesan synod consists of three houses: the house of bishops, the house of clergy and the house of laity. Among other things, it debates matters affecting the Church of England, makes provision for them in relation to the diocese and advises the Bishop on any matters he has referred to them. It is helpful if rural deans are members of diocesan synod and, if this interests you, information about how to put yourself forward for election is available from Church House.

The key document in this area is the booklet *Standing Orders for the Chichester Diocesan Synod*. As before, specific queries may be addressed to the diocesan secretary at Church House.

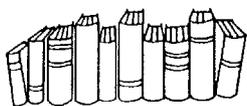
Financial Information

Rural deans receive an extra payment to cover the expenses of their office and in recognition of the importance of their position. The current allowance rate may be found in the Blue book. Unfortunately the allowance is taxable, but it can be offset against your expenses as rural dean when you complete your tax return. Keeping a clear record of your expenses makes this easier. Please contact the Diocesan Secretary at Church House for any further information on financial matters.

And finally

Parish clergy, church wardens, bishops and archdeacons greatly value the supportive and pivotal work of the rural dean – much of it informal. Incumbents in particular value the friendship and non-interfering support of their rural dean. A big thank you to all rural deans for all you do! And never hesitate to ring or e-mail your archdeacon or Church House for any help or advice.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the *Guidelines for lay chairs of Deanery Synods*.



Useful Books

- * Arrangements for Confirmations
 - * Canons of the Church of England
 - * Recommended Standing Orders and Model Rules for Deanery Synod
 - * Standing Orders for the Chichester Diocesan Synod
 - * Notes for Sequestrators
 - * General Directions of the Chancellor (about Faculties etc in the diocese)
 - Church Representation Rules
 - Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors
- by K M Macmorran & T.Briden

* available from Church House, Hove

APPENDIX A

Canon C23 of RURAL DEANS

1. Every rural dean shall report to the bishop any matter in any parish within the deanery which it may be necessary or useful for the bishop to know, particularly any case of serious illness or other form of distress amongst the clergy, the vacancy of any cure of souls and the measures taken by the sequestrators to secure the ministration of the word and sacraments and other rites of the Church during the said vacancy, and any case of a minister from another diocese officiating in any place otherwise than as provided in Canon C8.
2. In the case of any omission in any parish to prepare and maintain a church electoral roll or to form or maintain a parochial church council or to hold the annual parochial church meeting, the rural dean on such omission being brought to his notice shall ascertain and report to the bishop the cause thereof.
3. If at any time the rural dean has reason to believe that there is any serious defect in the fabric, ornaments, and furniture of any church or chapel, or that the buildings of any benefice are in a state of disrepair, he shall report the matter to the archdeacon.
4. The rural dean shall be a joint chairman (with a member of the House of Laity) of the deanery synod.

APPENDIX B

Extract from the Synodical Government Measure 1969

The functions of a Deanery Synod

5.- (3) The functions of a deanery synod shall be:

- (a) to consider matters concerning the Church of England and to make provision for such matters in relation to their deanery, and to consider and express their opinion on any other matters of religious or public interest;
- (b) to bring together the views of the parishes of the deanery on common problems, to discuss and formulate common policies on those problems, to foster a sense of community and interdependence among those parishes, and generally to promote in the deanery the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical;
- (c) to make known, and so far as appropriate put into effect any provision made by the diocesan synod;
- (d) to consider the business of the diocesan synod, and particularly any matters referred to that synod by the General Synod, and to sound parochial opinion whenever they are required or consider it appropriate to do so;
- (e) to raise such matters as the deanery synod consider appropriate with the diocesan synod:

Provided that the functions referred to in paragraph (a) hereof shall not include the issue of any statement purporting to declare the doctrine of the Church on any question.

5.- (4) If the diocesan synod delegate to deanery synods functions in relation to the parishes of their deaneries, and in particular the determination of parochial shares in quotas allocated to the deaneries, the deanery synod shall exercise those functions.

In this subsection 'quota' means an amount to be subscribed to the expenditure authorised by diocesan synods.

5.- (5) The General Synod may by Canon or Regulation extend, amend or further define the functions of deanery synods.

7.- (1) The rules contained in Schedule 3 to this Measure, which may be cited as the Church Representation Rules, shall have effect for the purpose of providing for the constitution and proceedings of diocesan and deanery synods and making further provision for the synodical government of the Church, including the matters hitherto provided for by the Rules for the Representation of the Laity:

Provided that the said rules may at any time be amended by a resolution of the General Synod passed by a majority in each House of not less than two-thirds of those present and voting.

For the formal constitution of the deanery synod see Schedule 3 Part III of the Synodical Government Measure 1969, also known and published as the Church Representation Rules (see Ecclesiastical Law 2nd Ed Mark Hill p376 and pp605-608)

Published by Church House, 211 New Church Road, Hove, BN3 4ED